

Western MRS Meeting Notes
August 21, 2007
AB Tech, Asheville

Counties Present: Buncombe, Catawba, Henderson, Iredell, McDowell.

Introductions

News from Raleigh

Fish Principles – from the MRS Institute

DV Policy

CFTs During Assessment – When, Why, How, Fidelity to Model

Goals for Coming Year

News from Raleigh

- Planning for the PIP continues, we have send the draft.
- Some major themes are:
 - Interagency collaboration
 - Cultural Competence
 - Accountability
 - How we work with courts
 - How we engage our families during in-home services
- Esther will be retiring as Interim Section Chief in November
- Have selected a new set of 10 counties to work with in depth on MRS evaluation (the original 10 have done their share!)
- Started pilot for the 210 documentation form that the work group developed.
 - McDowell is one of the counties that piloted it.

Fish Principles - Had a speaker at the MRS Institute that talked about these principles.

- Play
 - Do some extra things around the office that are kinda fun!
- Choose your Attitude
 - Make a conscious effort to have a good attitude – its too hard to stay in a bad mood
- Make their Day!
 - Do something that makes someone's else's day – it will probably make yours too!
- Be there
 - When you have a million things going on at home or at work, it may be hard, but you need to be there for the person that is in front of you right now.

DV Policy– Policy, Challenges, CFTs

Crystal Williams, one of the DV trainers was here.

- When she talks at training, one of the biggest goals is to differentiate between discord and actual DV..
- In a DV relationship the force, coercion, power, are all held by one person over the other and the one without the power is not able to parent and live a normal life because of the actions of the abuser.

- In some families, both parents are physically violent with each other and may need to use more assessments to see what is going on. It is almost impossible to truly have 2 batterers in a relationship. You may have 2 people fighting, but not true DV in that case.
- We want to call it the correct thing because we don't want batterers to sit in anger management, and don't want non-batterers to be in DV counseling.
- Has to be a pattern to be labeled DV.
- In intake we don't know if it is a pattern or not, and we can't change that – often reporters do not know the pattern or history.

Holly hears about situational violence. Something happened and one parent hit the other (or maybe they both hit each other) and there was an incident. This would be more a discord issue, not true DV.

- The number one thing to determine true DV is who has the power and control and look at the pattern around this. Don't just look at the physical violence, but the things behind that. What happens in the tension-building phase? What keeps the control relationships? Maybe it is the threat of violence that keeps things the way the batterer wants, maybe it is the threat of harm to children, maybe it is the intimidation and there is rarely a need for physical violence.

Is there a statewide initiative or something that is working to get a real DV program in all 100 counties?

- There are some programs that are really just anger management or couples therapy, not the 26-week program. Because there was a lapse in a position some agencies were certified that should not have been. They are not true DV programs. If people hear about those, please let Crystal know. They are working to rectify this situation.
- Website: Doa.state.nc.us/cfw/cfw.html or Google NC Council for Women and Domestic Violence Commission
- There are some discrepancies between the laws and procedures that Law Enforcement uses and DSS.
- How about CFTs? Usually separate but sometimes they are together. Buncombe actually has a restraining order that specifies no contact except at a CFT called by DSS.
- Problem with community assessment providers – often DSS knows there is a problem (SA or DV) but when they refer someone to a provider and the assessment comes back with no treatment recommendations their hands are tied.
- Whenever we start concentrating on an area, there are several phases that people generally go through. First, no one wants to do it, then there is overkill and people rush to see everything as DV when it might not be. But that is natural, it happened with neglect cases as family assessment when we rolled out MRS. It takes awhile to reach the natural equilibrium.
- Need to not only send the offender to treatment, but the victim to some sort of counseling to see why they get into these relationships.
- Directors Association has a project where they go into counties and bring key decision makers together and talk about DV across systems and try to leave with an action plan. However, these are only as good as the people that are willing to come to them.
- There is a law that enhances the penalty by charging with “committing an act of violence in the presence of a minor”.

- Just as with everything else, have to educate community again and again. Particularly for judges. They will go to the Judicial Conference and hopefully we can do something there but the ones that come to meetings in your community are probably the ones who are on board anyway.
- Also feel that we need to have DV training for the WF folks.

CFT during the assessment

Holly is part of a national workgroup that will be meeting in Denver on 9/27. 15 people from all over the nation on this committee (also from Ontario and New Zealand.) They will be developing a blueprint around best practice for these types of meetings. Hopefully when she comes back there will be a draft of this blueprint, and she will probably bring it to MRS meetings for feedback and also have a workgroup to discuss it.

Started by polling - people at this meeting do hold CFTs during the assessment

- What makes you want to hold them during the assessment?
- When there is a situation where there is a need to bring professionals together and there is some conflict about what different parties involved are saying, and concern if something does not change, a child will need foster care.
- To stop he said/she said and get everyone together. Gets everyone together and lets everyone hear the same thing and everyone is accountable for their piece.
- Helps the parent with other options in how to care for their child and a good place to get ideas that may end up altering the case decision in the end.

Be careful in what you are calling a CFT. If it is the Division's meeting to meet their goals, it is not a CFT and every time more than 2 people meet, it is not a CFT. CFTs are for the family.

Do you see a difference in the dynamic because there is still a case decision looming over the families head, versus the ones during in-home services where the case decision is already been made?

- The difference some see is when there are MH issues involved or when the school system is involved. Often there is a system maneuvering issue and the SW is an advocate for the family during these meetings. In these cases it is very good for the family because they feel powerful that the SW advocated for them.
- Does the family seem to feel as free to talk when there is a case decision yet to be made?
- Not necessarily a bad thing, but we need to acknowledge that they may be editing themselves a little bit, and we need to allow for this and understand it. However, some folks feel that even when there has been a case decision, the families still hold back to an extent because this is DSS and they feel to some extent that it is always our meeting not theirs.
- Some have seen the other way, and once you get extended family in the meetings, even if the family would have tried to hold back in front of DSS, that didn't end up happening and all sorts of stuff comes out.
- Not sure that families really distinguish between a meeting in 210 and 215. They see it all as "involvement with DSS" and aren't as cognizant of the difference in phases as we are.
- So, basically, not a lot of difference.
- Feds said that our CFTs are really good and that they work well when they are followed as the policy dictates.

- There are still some counties that are not really doing CFTs the way that we intended and they are not really holding true to the model.
- On a scale of 1-10 (10 is best) where do you think you fall? Really depends on the worker, and also makes a difference if you don't have facilitators so SW have to facilitate each other's meetings. Think it makes it better if they have the option to use a facilitator, even if not in every case, in some of the more difficult ones. (5 or 6, 7, 5, improvement.)
- Feel that it is always best to have a neutral facilitator. No matter if you are best social worker in the world, it is hard to wear the hat of social worker and facilitator.
- Holly asked if people gave the family private family time during CFTs where the professionals leave the room for a certain amount of time and let the family discuss things on their own. (Scary to DSS, there is an issue of time, and some families might get into it if left alone.) May be more effective when they are talking about issues of kinship than some other issues.

Other Discussion – Supervisor Training

- Supervisor training – have heard nothing but positive feedback about the supervisor training that is offered. But once you have been back from the training it is over.
- Struggle with training for supervisors that is not about policy, but about how to manage people.
- Being the best SW ever does not necessarily make you a good supervisor. Most SW did not go to school for business, they need management training directed at human services providers
- New training, called Coaching in the Kitchen. Use it with SW but also with Supervisors.
- New training for Supervisors which is a follow up to the Intro
- Also want to have some nuts and bolts training – what types of reports, etc they need to do.
- Some training for people that are thinking about taking the step to apply for supervisory positions. Some people may decide that knowing up front what it really is, that they don't want it. When some people get a supervisory position they don't really want to shift what they do, and they still want to do home visits, and not go to meetings and do the other things that supervisors have to do.

Goals for the coming year – where would you like to see yourself or your agency

- Holly's goal is to do some of the fine-tuning. For the most part people "get it" now. Need to do the fine-tuning of the details, including bringing Foster Care into the mix.
- Hoping to make CFTs more useful in keeping children out of foster care, or, when children have to come into care, making Shared Parenting more successful.
- Do everything possible as a manager to help workers reduce caseloads.
- Looking at what they are doing, and making sure that they are not doing things just for the sake of doing it.
- Improving the way that case move from CPS to Foster Care
- Strengthening involvement with Work First.

Future Meetings - all at AB Tech
 October - Wednesday 31st
 November - Friday 30th